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Panel Censors Data to Avoid Embarrassment

Let some obstructionist withhold information from Congress and there will be a great bellyaching from outraged members. But all is quiet on Capitol Hill when information is suppressed by Congress' own functionaries.

The House Intelligence Committee, for example, recently raised a huge hullabaloo over alleged Soviet influence in the U.S. peace movement. But the documents released by the committee left out some key passages.

The deleted portions mentioned 13 House Democrats who were involved, one way or another, in conferences the FBI thought were manipulated from afar by the Kremlin.

No one would seriously suggest that they would willingly do the Soviets' dirty work. The reason for suppressing the material obviously was to spare the House members possible embarrassment.

The withheld material should have appeared last December in the committee's report, "Soviet Active Measures." The report has been used as evidence of President Reagan's claim that the Soviet Union has

been manipulating the nuclear freeze movement.

The censored documents fall short of making Reagan's case. One document, prepared by the World Peace Council, reviewed a "Dialogue on Disarmament and Detente" that it held in Washington. The council is described by the FBI as "the largest and most active Soviet front organization . . . one of the major Soviet instruments for political action in the peace movement." The panel cut 14 of the document's 47 pages.

The other material was a report, prepared by a coalition of groups that sponsored an anti-apartheid conference at Riverside Church in New York City. The G-men cited the conference as another example of Soviet machinations. The Intelligence Committee lopped 60 pages out of that report.

In both cases, the deleted material contained references to the participation or sponsorship in the events by one or more of the 13 House members.

My associates Tony Capaccio and Jack Mitchell obtained copies of the two complete documents. The controversial material was brought to their attention by John Barron, a senior editor of Reader's Digest, who is working on a new book about the Soviet KGB.

For the record, here are the baker's dozen: Reps. Ronald V. Dellums (Calif.); Ted Weiss (N.Y.); John

Conyers Jr. (Mich.); Don Edwards (Calif.); Charles B. Rangel (N.Y.); George W. Crockett Jr. (Mich.); Parren J. Mitchell (Md.); Gus Savage (Ill.); Mervyn M. Dymally (Calif.); Del. Walter E. Fauntroy (D.C.); and former representatives John Burton (D-Calif.); Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.); and Harold Washington (D-Ill.), who is now mayor of Chicago.

A member of the Intelligence Committee said the decision to withhold the material was made by the chairman, Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.), but added that "no one on the committee was very upset about not naming members."

Footnote: Those of the 13 who returned our calls said they hadn't known about the deletion of their names. Edwards speculated that Intelligence Committee members "were afraid to call me because I would have said they had been acting like the old House Un-American Activities Committee."

Who Invited Him?: Seated in the same row as White House officials at President Reagan's recent speech to Congress was a once-familiar Washington figure: Roy Cohn, chief counsel for the late senator Joseph McCarthy. Cohn wouldn't say how he got the coveted ticket. On the White House seating chart, his place said simply, "Speaker's Guest." The office of House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) denied O'Neill was the "speaker" referred to.